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Nevada Economic Assessment Project (NEAP) Program Evaluation Results Spring 2022

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Executive Summary

A program evaluation was administered online among all Nevada Economic Assessment Project (NEAP) Program partners in June 2022. The online survey link to Qualtrics, via an email, was sent out to all NEAP partners (N= 45), with an overall response rate of 42% (n=19). Although the response rate is less than half of NEAP Program partners, evaluation results are important to help highlight perception of the program thus far, identify areas for improvement, and assess program outcomes to date. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness and value of the program from the perspective of the partners. The survey consisted of 16 questions designed to better understand partner contributions to the program, program outcomes, data use and access, perception of the program, and benefits from participation in the program. The evaluation covered the first three years of the program, from 2018 to 2022. The evaluation was initiated, developed, and administered by University of Nevada, Reno Extension to assess the perception of the program among partners and gather feedback on areas for improvement.

The Nevada Economic Assessment Project (NEAP) is a statewide Extension program that began in 2018. NEAP was developed in partnership with various federal, state and local entities to help Nevada communities create quantitative and qualitative data for informed decision making and planning. The purpose of the program is to develop a comprehensive data repository of county socioeconomic (quantitative) and community assets (qualitative) baseline data to assist local planning and economic development initiatives. Survey tool consisted of a 10-minute online Qualtrics survey comprised of 16 questions. The survey opened on June 9, 2022, with an email introducing the survey and its purpose to all program partners from the partner contact list and a link to the Qualtrics survey. Two additional email reminders were sent to partners during the survey period, with links to the survey. The Qualtrics survey was set up in anonymous mode, thereby allowing program partners to send the survey to additional people within their organization to provide feedback. The survey was open a few weeks and closed on July 1, 2022.

Evaluation results indicate the most cited contributions from partners to the NEAP Program were: 1) sharing data resources, 2) information/knowledge sharing among partners, and 3) networking opportunities. The most important program outcomes as ranked by partners include: 1) understanding broader economic impacts, 2) socioeconomic trends/data, and 3) informing local decision making. When asked about accessing and using the data gathered by the NEAP Program, the majority of partners indicated accessing the data through the NEAP website, followed by hardcopies provided by Extension staff. Nearly 60% (n=10) of partners who completed the survey indicate they prefer to access the data from a digital dashboard as part of the NEAP website. Partners are using the data primarily for planning documents, economic development plans, and other uses such as Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) and community education efforts. Perception of the overall program was rated as both highly effective and highly valuable along all measures of program effectiveness and program value. Finally, program partners identified benefits from participating in the program, such as: 1) informative, 2) led to an exchange of resources, and 3) improved relationships among the partners.

Introduction

The Nevada Economic Assessment Project (NEAP) is a statewide Extension program that began in 2018. NEAP was initially developed in cooperation with state and federal agencies and local government officials with the goal of compiling quantitative and qualitative baseline data to support land use planning efforts, public scoping processes, and local planning and economic development initiatives. NEAP works closely with the partners to develop a comprehensive repository of socioeconomic data and community assets across each Nevada County. Although the NEAP Program has been led by Extension, its reach and impact is the result of collaborative partnerships among all of the various program partners. As a program evaluation tool, this assessment examines more than simply the program outcomes, but also how partners collaborated, contributions among partners in the program, resources shared, and overall perceived value and effectiveness of program among the partners.

Collaborative efforts such as the NEAP Program require interorganizational networking, support and relationship building to reach a shared desired outcome. Since the NEAP Program began, 17 socioeconomic technical reports have been developed for all 17 Nevada counties, including updated reports with 2020 Census data. In addition, 85 fact sheets have been created, reflecting demographics, economic, land use and fiscal, industry top performers, and social characteristics for each Nevada county. NEAP has also convened 17 county workshops, and 13 community engagement workshops, which produced 13 other special publications and 13 fact sheets summarizing community assets as identified by county residents. A total of 128 community publications have been developed and 30 total community workshops have been provided as a result of the NEAP Program since 2018.

Beyond the generated reports listed above, outreach initiatives and community workshops, additional outcomes were identified by NEAP partners on the evaluation. The evaluation was both an assessment to document the collaborative efforts, as well

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as an evaluation to examine the programmatic outcomes. Additional benefits from the evaluation include gathering feedback from partners to examine and understand how the data is being accessed, used and identify gaps or possible next steps for the NEAP Program. The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the instrument protocol and rendered a decision "DETERMINATION OF NOT HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH" # 1789-136-1.

Methods

The NEAP Program Evaluation was open in Qualtrics, an online survey software platform, from June 9 through July 1, 2022. An email was sent to the NEAP partner contact list (N=45), introducing the survey and providing the survey link on June 9, 2022. Individuals were permitted to share details of the survey and the online evaluation link with other individuals within their organization if they had also been involved with the NEAP Program. Two reminder emails with the survey link, per the Dillman method (Dillman et al., 2009) was re-sent to the initial 45 individuals on June 16, 2022, and June 23, 2022, to encourage participation in the survey. The survey closed on July 1, 2022. The Qualtrics survey was set in anonymous mode; therefore, survey administrators were unable to see who had completed the survey and who had not completed the survey.

The Qualtrics survey consisted of 16 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey evaluation was adapted from the PARTNER Tool (2018), and designed to evaluate partner contributions, social networks, partner benefits, program outcomes and program effectiveness based on partner perceptions (Varda et al., 2020). Questions on the survey included:
- Partner organization category
- Length of time with the NEAP Program
- Contributions from their organization into the program
- Outcomes from the program
- Program effectiveness
- Value of the program
- Collaboration among the various partner categories
- Access and use of NEAP data
- Preference for future data access
- Benefits to their organization from participating in NEAP

DETERMINING EFFECTIVENESS AND VALUE

A unique methodology was used to generate partners' perception of the effectiveness and value of the NEAP Program through the creation of a perception map. To generate the overall rating of the NEAP Program regarding effectiveness and value, and to ensure an unbiased perception rating (Lee et al., 2016) an average score was calculated over the four items regarding how effective the NEAP Program has been at reaching each of the program's four initial goals:
1) developing a data repository
2) developing input/output models for potential economic sectors

3) creating an accessible NEAP website

4) helping with informed decision making.

Each goal was rated on a scale of 1, not effective to 9, very effective. Scores were then averaged for each partner group across the four measures of effectiveness to determine an overall score for effectiveness. A perception map template in MS Excel (Perception Map Template, 2021-2024) was used to generate the plotting of scores to ensure an unbiased perception map.

To generate the overall rating for the value of the NEAP Program, the same method was used for determining the effectiveness score. That is, an average score was determined over the four measurements regarding how valuable partners rated four items reflecting the value of the NEAP process: Value items were reflective of desired collaboration goals among partners and included:

1) Bringing together diverse stakeholders

2) Virtual and in-person meetings

3) Engagement workshops with local communities

4) Building relationships among counties and other agencies

Each process was rated for its value on a scale of 1, not valuable to 9, very valuable. Scores were then averaged for each partner group across the four measures of value to determine an overall score for value.

Results

Forty-five individuals were sent an email and survey link, with 19 individuals (n=19) completing the survey over the three weeks for an overall response rate of 42%. Although the response rate is less than half of NEAP Program partners, evaluation results are important to help highlight perception of the program thus far, identify areas for improvement, and assess program outcomes to date. NEAP partners who completed the survey represented all four categories of partners, with the highest response from state partners (100%) followed by federal partners (40%). Table 1 summarizes the percentage of survey respondents per each partner category and length of time with the NEAP Program (Table 1).

Table 1. NEAP partner survey response rate and length of program involvement

	Time w/NEAP Program (months)	Federal	State	Local	Nonprofit Other	Total
	3-6	0	0	3	0	3
	6-12	0	2	0	0	2
	12-24	0	2	1	0	3
	24-36	2	4	3	2	11
Total Survey Count N=		5	8	26	6	45
Completed Survey Count n=		2	8	7	2	19
Response Rate per Category		40%	100%	27%	33%	42%

CONTRIBUTIONS

Any successful partnership requires different contributions and partner support to make the program successful (Frey et al., 2006). Survey respondents were asked to select what their organization has contributed to the NEAP Program. Participants were allowed to select as many items as they felt their organization contributed. Thirteen types of contributions were identified and described below (Table 2).

Table 2. Contributions to the NEAP Program and their descriptions

	Contribution	Description
1	Funding	Financial support for the NEAP Program, either in the form of grants, cost-share agreements, or contract for services
2	In-kind resources	Nonfinancial support, such as meeting space, support staff and volunteers
3	Data resources	Additional data resources used in the NEAP reports, such as public land data, visitor use, plus data collection, data analysis, etc.
4	Information	Local generated information, such as economic development plans, local CEDS reports, etc.
5	Networking	Contacts with other organizations/groups beyond one's own organization
6	Education/How to use data	Workshops on understanding the data and how to interpret the data for local decision making and planning
7	Public land expertise	Agency or outside organizations who provide expertise on public land issues, such as recreation use, wildlife or hunting information, minerals, etc.
8	Community engagement	Workshops with local communities to lead asset mapping, discuss NEAP findings or gathering local community input
9	Facilitation/Leadership	Providing leadership and facilitation for the core NEAP team and coordinating meetings
10	IT/Web resources	NEAP webpage with information, updates and access to all NEAP reports and surveys via the website
11	Marketing	Disseminating information regarding NEAP workshops, meetings, or community events

A total of 84 responses were tallied among the 19 respondents reflecting contributions to the NEAP Program. The most frequently cited contributions from the NEAP partners included information (17%), networking (14%), community engagement (13%) and data resources (12%). All contributions from partners are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Contributions from partners to the NEAP Program

Contributions	Count	Percent
Information	14	17%
Networking	12	14%
Community engagement	11	13%
Data resources	10	12%
Public land expertise	8	10%
In-kind resources	7	8%
Funding	6	7%
Marketing	6	7%
Education/Data use	5	6%
Facilitation/Leadership	3	4%
IT/Web	1	1%
Other	1	1%
Total	**84**	**100%**

When asked what were the most important three contributions to the NEAP Program, partners cited, Data resources (21%), Information (20%), and Networking Opportunities (14%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Three most important contributions to the NEAP Program as rated by partners

Rank	Contributions	Count	Percent
1	Data Resources	12	21%
2	Information Sharing	11	20%
3	Networking Opportunities	8	14%

OUTCOMES

The top three outcomes cited by partners (with the second highest ranked tied) include: 1) gained an understanding of socioeconomic trends/data, 2a) gained new sources of data and understanding how to use the data, 2b) gained understanding of broader impacts, and 3) informed local decision making (Table 5). A list of the overall outcomes identified and their rank are included in Table 5.

Table 5. Overall outcomes identified by NEAP partners

Rank	NEAP Outcomes	Count
1	Gained an understanding of socioeconomic trends/data.	14
2	Gained new sources of data and understanding how to use data.	13
2	Gained understanding of broader impacts	13
3	Informed local decision making	10
4	Increased engagement with the community	9
4	Gained understanding of assets in the community	9
5	Improved relationships and networking	8
6	Developed input/output models	5
6	Data Repository	5
6	Support for Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)	5
7	Increased economic opportunities	4
	Other: *Better comments on Federal NEPA Projects*	2
	Total	97

When asked what the three most important outcomes from the NEAP Program were, 16 people responded and ranked: 1) gained an understanding of broader impacts (31.25%), 2) gained understanding of socioeconomic trends/data (25%), and 3) informed local decision making (18.75%) Table 6.

Table 6. Three most important outcomes from NEAP

Outcomes	Count	Percent
Understand broader impacts	5	31%
Socioeconomic trends/data	4	25%
Inform local decision making	3	19%

ACCESSING DATA AND NEAP USE

One of the goals of the NEAP Program was to develop a data repository and make it accessible for program partners to use in local decision making and assist with planning efforts. To evaluate the program, we asked participants how they currently access the data, how they would prefer to access the data, and how they have used the data with their organization, or in decision making.

Survey results indicate partners predominately access the data compiled for the NEAP Program on the NEAP website, with over 50% of respondents indicating they access the website to download reports and print PDFs. Respondents were permitted to answer more than one type of access, whereby 91% of respondents have accessed the data compiled by NEAP (Table 7).

Table 7. Partners currently access data compiled by NEAP Program

Access to the Data from NEAP	Count	Percent
NEAP webpage (PDFs, downloads, etc.)	12	55%
Hardcopies provided by Extension	3	14%
Contact/Called Extension directly	2	9%
From another agency/organization	2	9%
Have not accessed the data	2	9%
Other	1	5%
Total	22	100%*

May not equal 100% due to rounding

When asked *how* partners would prefer to access the data created by NEAP, the overwhelming response was through a digital data dashboard as part of the NEAP webpage (59%), followed by PDFs available for download on the NEAP website (35%). Please note: One person did express an interest to have data updates send via a newsletter (Table 8).

Table 8. Partner preference for accessing data

Access to Data	Count	Percent
Dashboard as part of NEAP website	10	59%
PDFs Accessible on NEAP website	6	35%
Newsletter with updates	1	6%
Hardcopies sent to me	0	0%
Total	17	100%

Survey respondents indicated 91% have accessed the data compiled by NEAP (Table 6). The evaluation wanted to learn *how* our partners have used the data. Data compiled by NEAP has been used for planning documents (28%), economic development plans (21%), feasibility studies and assessments (17%) grant applications (14%) and other uses (16%). Other uses cited by respondents included: community education, economic impact to local communities, environmental impact statements as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) comments. (Table 9).

Table 9. How partners have used data compiled by NEAP

Data Use	Response Count	Percent
Planning documents	8	28%
Economic development plans	6	21%
Feasibility studies/assessments	5	17%
Grant applications	4	14%
Other	5	17%
Never used the data	1	3%
Total	29	100%

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND VALUE

The effectiveness and value of the NEAP Program was rated by the NEAP partners (i.e., federal, state, local, and nonprofit) to determine an overall perception based on established criteria. A perception map (Fox, 1998; Michalski & Cousins, 2000; Gigauri, 2019) was generated to plot the overall rating by each partner category.

Based on responses, all partners perceive the NEAP Program to be both highly effective and highly valuable (Figure 1). The size of the colored circle represents program partners. The larger the size of the circle, the greater the number of responses we received from that partner group (Figure 1) As shared in Table 1, a count of survey participants per partner category is listed for reference. Based on the response scores provided, all partners have a high perception of both the effectiveness and value of the NEAP Program, as illustrated on the perception map. (Figure 1).
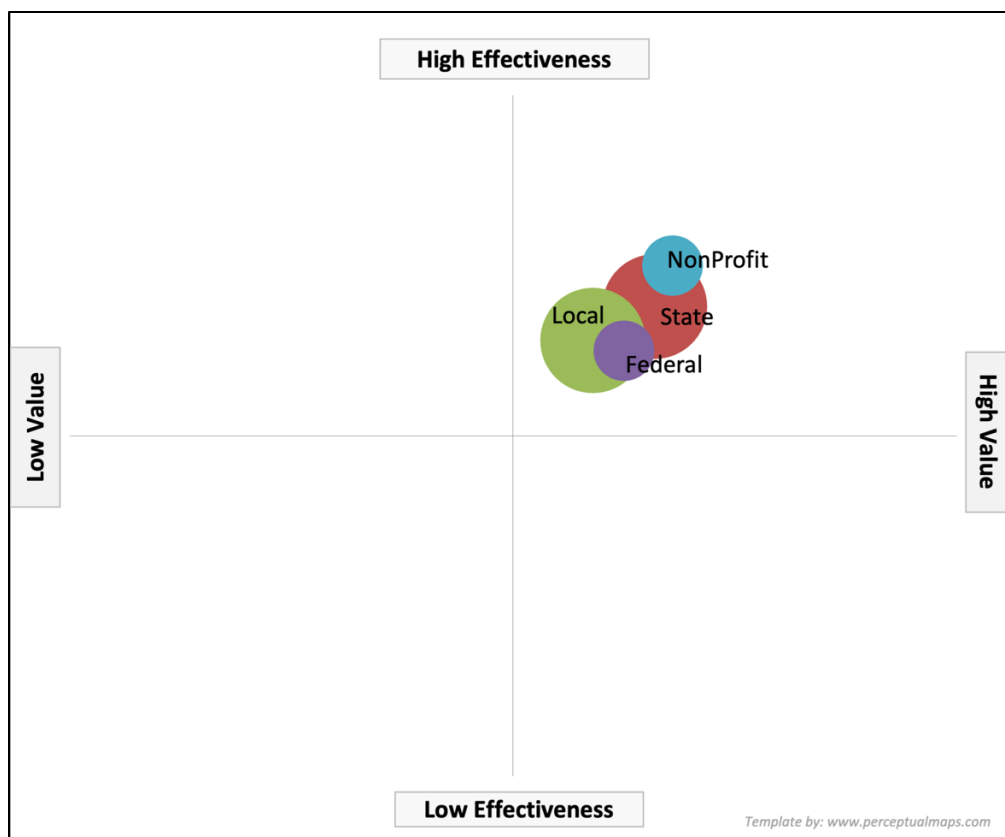
Figure 1. Partner perception of the NEAP Program, reflecting both effectiveness and value.

Finally, partners were asked to indicate if their participation in the NEAP Program has been beneficial and how. Overwhelmingly, partners indicated their participation in the program has been informative and led to an exchange of resources, which was more strongly rated by state partners (Table 10, Figure 2). Additional benefits included improved relationships among the partners, which was more strongly rated among local partners (Table 10, Figure 2). As a more user-friendly graphic, Figure 2 is included to visually display Table 10.

Table 10. Partner benefits from NEAP

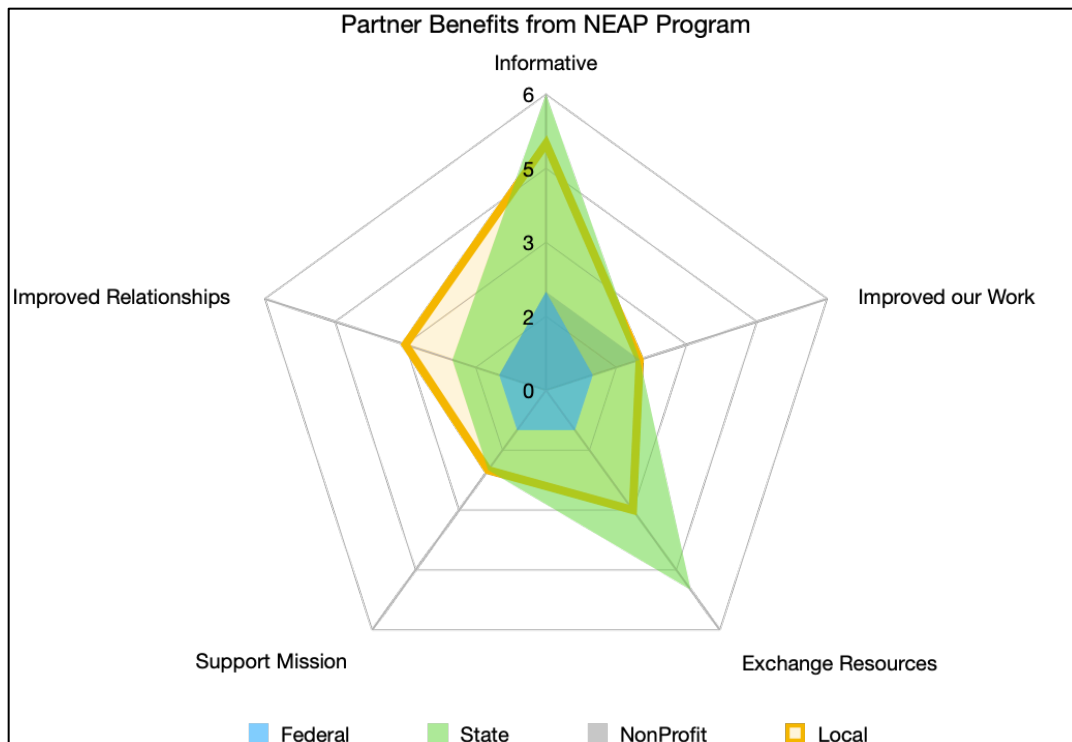|	Federal	State	Local	Nonprofit
Informative	2	6	5	2
Improved our work	1	2	2	2
Exchange resources	1	5	3	0
Support mission	1	2	2	0
Improved relationships	1	2	3	1

Figure 2. Partner benefits from participating in the NEAP Program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results from the NEAP Program Evaluation indicate during the first three years, the program has been effective in reaching its initial goals of: 1) developing a data repository, 2) creating input/output models for economic sectors, 3) creating a user-friendly website, and 4) helping with informed decision making. Additionally, the program has been valuable in the processes of: 1) bringing together diverse stakeholders, 2) leading meetings both in-person and virtual, 3) delivering community workshops, and 4) building relationships among counties and other agencies.

Contributions by program partners have included data resources, information and networking opportunities. Beyond the 128 community-focused peer-reviewed publications and over 30 community workshops, additional outcomes thus far from the three-year program cited by partners include: 1) an understanding of socioeconomic trends and data, 2) new sources of data, and 3) understanding the broader impacts from data collected.

Although NEAP has been successful in working in every Nevada county with local entities, a significant shortcoming of the NEAP Program thus far has been the lack of tribal participation and partnerships. NEAP has worked to reach out to our tribal partners but has been unsuccessful in building these important partnerships during the first three years of the program. As Nevada is home to 20 federally recognized tribes that encompass 1.16 million acres, and the majority of Nevada's tribal nations (97%) are rural (Nevada Indian Commission, accessed April 2, 2023), fostering these partnerships

to build a comprehensive data repository of socioeconomic and community assets would also benefit our tribal nations and help enhance informed decision making. While some issues regarding data collection may exists, such as readily accessible and reliable socioeconomic data for tribal nations, a more concerted effort needs to be undertaken to reach out to our tribal partners and include tribal nations in the NEAP Program.

Next steps for the NEAP Program are currently underway and include developing a data dashboard for easier and independent access to the socioeconomic data, follow- up workshops with communities, train-the-trainer sessions on using the data, and expanding our partners to include more non-profits and tribal nations. Data compiled by NEAP can be used to reflect housing needs and opportunities, assessments for economic sectors, leveraging community assets for development, and gathering community input into local decision making. NEAP is open to working with other entities who can benefit from a user-friendly data base to help inform decision making.

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